

DORA SCRIPT

Introduction Claire Pajackowska

The problem with publishing a script (as Andrew always said) is that it tends to foster the illusion of being offered a real, irreducible, 'authorised' version of the perplexing experience of seeing a film. It must be made clear that this is the *script* and *not the film* and that although the script is a useful tool for a better understanding of the film (especially this film which zooms by in a torrent of words), the film's real conditions of presence is in fact the screenings – that is where the film works.

So, to contextualise this script it is important to say a few words about the screening. The film was made as an interventionist text to be shown and discussed in several specific contexts; to bring to the feminist movement my sense of our need to discuss and theorise sexuality, to bring to the psychoanalytic institutions (training schools, hospitals, therapy centres and clinics) an interrogation of the politics of their theory and practice, and also as a gift to other filmmakers, a contribution to our history and an argument in the history of the avant-garde.

The film has been screened in all these contexts. Over the past year, Ivan and I have been screening and discussing it in the U.K. whilst Jane, Andrew and Anthony have accompanied its U.S. screenings. (It has also been shown in Germany, France, Italy, Australia and New Zealand). After a year it is still hard to know what constitutes the success or failure of the film. We all maintain that the function of this project, like any other political project, is to make itself redundant, to

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change the relations of power that necessitates its presence. This is probably worth maintaining in a discourse such as film, where a film is all too easily thought of as an inviolate object – once finished, eternally enduring (celluloid permitting), a timeless expression of an artistic vision – and to underline the alternative reality that a film is a series of relations and therefore a practice.

When practising *Sigmund Freud's Dora* I have found that a number of problems can be guaranteed to arise – each context brings its specific problems – the problem of erotophobia in feminism – the problem of the tenacious conservatism of 'liberal' psychoanalysis – the problem of the indignation of 'cultured' filmgoers when asked to work at a film. Film critics don't like the film, which might be a tacit acknowledgement of the fact that the filmmakers don't like film critics – that part of Jay Street's project has always been to undermine the tripartite institution of filmmaker/critic/audience in a film's deployment. We speak directly to an audience; not *as* an audience (in the sense of auditors), but addressing them as speakers, as actively engaged in 'speaking' the film and its politics.

So many transgressions (the main one being to have made a film at all), have entailed that the usual post-coital muted depression of 'after the movie' has been transformed into a breeding ground for conflict and heated argument, often carrying on for hours at a time. This is partly because of the difficulty of acknowledging and understanding unspeakable power relations in oneself, especially when these pass through sexuality; and also partly because to

watch a film is to be subjected to an aggressive act – even though it can also be pleasurable.

The conflicts continue, both inside and outside of self, collective cinema, classroom, clinic, women's group; Jay Street continues to make films (money permitting) and the relations of power and subjection of which *Dora* speaks are far from being transformed. (For a discussion of *Dora* in relation to the distribution and exhibition of independent film see Felicity Oppe's article in the August '81 issue of *Screen*)

As a theoretical project the aim is to understand and to be understood; before each screening the audience is given a set of film notes if possible; this works against the idea that the film 'speaks for itself', tends to focus discussion and may produce a more pleasurable reading of the film for those people who come to see it without having thought through, or better still, fought through, the issues at stake. This practice will probably come to a stop when the BFI take over distribution as they don't have time for this kind of thing. The following is an extract from the film notes:

FILM NOTES

The film developed from a reading group on language and psychoanalysis in which nine people – including the four filmmakers – had been involved in the spring of 1979. Jane Weinstock and Claire Pajackowska had previously been in a woman's group reading 'Dora'; Anthony McCall and Andrew Tyndall had made a feature length film about male fashion advertising and avant-garde filmmaking called 'Argument'. Together we decided to develop a film about Freud's famous 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' – the case of 'Dora'.

We chose Dora as a text because it provides a site from which to discuss the intersection of several issues:

A theory of female sexuality

The historical development of psychoanalysis as an 'Ideological State Apparatus' often used by dominant ideology to try to reconcile women to their position within the family.

An understanding of hysteria not only as an illness but as an inevitable predicament of women who speak in a language which has never been ours, a phallogentric language.

The question is how to analyse that language, how it *represents*. In the representation of Dora, the representation of female sexuality, in psychoanalytic theory, and representation in films.

In 1899, having just completed the *Interpretation of Dreams* and a long period of self analysis, Freud started treatment with an eighteen year old girl. She was brought to him for analysis by her father after she had written a suicide note. Freud was keen to start the treatment of his first real case history; he wrote to Fliess in 1899 "the case has opened smoothly to my collection of picklocks". It seemed that the case would prove his hypotheses on the working of the unconscious as he had first articulated them in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

But what should have been a successful treatment became an argument, and three months later the girl walked out of analysis giving Freud only two weeks notice 'just like a governess'. Freud (in revenge) gave her the name Dora, the name that his sister had given to a maidservant who had the same name as herself.

So from the start we can only know 'Dora' as Freud constructs her. Not even as a 'her', a whole character in his 'roman a clef', but as a recollection of the words that Freud remembers her having spoken.

Thus what becomes clear is that for Freud, Dora is a function of his search for knowledge, a function of the text – that in order for him to maintain his inquiry into an object of knowledge it is necessary that he *construct* her as that which is unknown, the secret for his picklock, the ‘Dark Continent’ of female sexuality.

In order to evaluate what is useful to us in Freud’s work on sexuality we are constantly brought back to the text. In order to contextualise it, to prevent his work from being seen as monolithic, this case history should be understood in terms of its historical place in a 19th Century scientism and the literary genres of that time. Although on one level it is written as a novella, or a detective story, whose mystery is the structure of female sexuality and whose narrative thrust is the libidinal flow of Freud’s own unconscious towards this object of desire, in order to understand exactly how it is that Freud’s subjectivity is implicated in the case/text we are brought back to the very tools, the conceptual framework that he uses to understand Dora.

These are some of the tools we need for a feminist appropriation of psychoanalytic theory as a political weapon.

Freud gives us Dora’s language, her dreams retold to him (like gifts), her descriptions of memories, her replies to his questions. This was the first time that hysteria was understood in terms other than the inventory of *visible symptoms*. Twenty years previously, Freud had been working with the only doctors involved in hysteria, at Charcot’s clinic in Paris, whose methodology consisted of looking at women for signs of hysteria (which was believed to be a physiologic disorder that affected specific neuro-anatomic areas of the brain – almost the equivalent of a ‘malfunctioning of the womb’ as it was supposed in earlier generations).

This transformation from understanding as being that which is visible through to

understanding as being a function of the spoken, of language, is the first weapon we should appropriate.

Advertising and Pornography – how are they different?

Examining the way that dominant ideology represents female sexuality we took two series of images, the first from television advertising, the second from the pornography industry.

The first, television advertisements, treat the relation between women’s sexuality and a demand for hygiene, for purity. The Pine Sol ad equates female solidarity with a shared preference for rigorous household cleanliness; the potentially disturbing presence of a new cleaning lady in her employer’s home is resolved by their mutually high standards of how clean is Clean.

The antiperspirant Tickle counterpoints the phallic packaging – “I love Tickle with its big wide ball”, with a virginal girl in a Victorian sailor suit insisting on how important it is to keep dry. A simultaneous affirmation that our sexuality is organised around phallic penetration and a denial of the organic exudation of the female body.

The Feminine Deoderant Spray deals with a different contradiction, the professional woman, powerful despite (because of) sexual difference, must make sure that the more-than-soap-and-water cleanliness of her genitals is extended throughout her working day.

Dora despises her mother’s ‘housewife’s psychosis’. “She was occupied all day long in cleaning the house with its furniture and utensils and in keeping them clean – to such an extent that it made almost impossible to use or enjoy them. This condition, traces of which are to be found often enough in normal housewives, inevitably reminds one of forms of obsessional washing and other kinds of cleanliness. The relation between the girl

and her mother had been unfriendly for years. The daughter looked down on her mother and used to criticise her mercilessly...”

The absence of any further discussion of Dora’s mother from the case history is not unlike the significant absence of any absence of domestic labour in non-feminist critiques of capitalist economy. Whilst looking at the institution of housewifery inasmuch as it is represented by advertising, it becomes clear that within what is ostensibly a depiction of work, domestic labour, there is also implicit a depiction of certain prescribed sexualities. Notably one that is organised around phallic penetration and narcissistic pleasure in one’s own body, from which the sexual guilt is absolved by counterpointed themes of cleanliness and purity.

The second series of representations are hardly in the visual currency circulating for the definition of our sexualities. Pornography as an industry is directed at a male consumption and we are often influenced by pornography only at second hand, through an other’s imaginary and symbolic representation of our bodies.

In the film we confront these images directly ... and ask ourselves to consider women’s complex and contradictory reactions to these images. Do we merely reproduce the conditions of their original manufacture? Can they mean something different when contextualised within a feminist enquiry into the relation between our bodies and representation?

Are there any elements in these depictions of sexual gratification (albeit for a masculine audience) which might be subversive in a puritan society which is founded on the denial of sensuality and the repression of the body? The housewife not her husband is expected to condemn prostitution, pornography, sexual deviance. How does women’s historical function as the upkeepers of moral standards in society

inform the ‘natural’ outrage of the Women Against Pornography movement?

Although we take psychoanalytic theories of sexuality as a necessary framework for asking these questions it is not without questioning the ideological ramifications of that theory itself. The film asks: “When my sexualities are represented, in theory, in film, in language, how does this define the position from which resistance to that representation is articulated?”

Sigmund Freud’s Dora: A Case of Mistaken Identity (1979) 36 mins

Written and directed by

Anthony McCall
Claire Pajaczkowska
Andrew Tyndall
Jane Weinstock

Additional writing and development

Ivan Ward

Cast

Suzanne Fletcher – *Talking Lips*
Sylvia Kolbowski – *Dora*
Joel Kovel – *Freud*
Anne Hegira – *Dora’s Mother*

Cinematography

Babette Mangolte

Sound Recording

Deedee Halleck

Opticals

Bill Brand

Make-up

Kenny Angelico

Stills

Scott Bowron

Technical Assistance

Jean Brunel, George Griffin, Dana Sagalyn

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